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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 007158

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [PINS](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: STATUS OF GAZA-EGYPT BORDER SECURITY: SEPTEMBER 14.

Classified by DCM Stuart E. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Embassy officers on the scene report that the Egyptian Rafah border terminal is technically closed to pedestrian traffic going either way but that efforts to secure the border are moving slowly. In the 5km stretch to the north of the terminal, hundreds of Palestinians are transferring goods from Egypt back to Gaza. Security sources in Cairo tell us they have set a deadline of 1800 for all Palestinians (many shopping in nearby Egyptian town of El Arish) to depart Egypt back to Gaza or they will be arrested for illegally entering the country. This deadline is being publicized on the border but Emboffs on the border doubt that this deadline can be enforced today given the numbers of Palestinians in the El Arish area. End summary.

2. (C) Embassy officers at the border report that Egyptian interior ministry security forces and Border Guards are deployed along the border and have begun efforts to restrict the flow of hundreds of Palestinians crossing back and forth across the border. Security officials say the border is technically closed to traffic either way, but measures to control movement have not yet significantly restricted the flow.

3. (C) Emboffs report that most of the Palestinians have crossed to purchase goods in the Egyptian coastal city of El Arish 50 kilometers from the border. One El Arish restaurateur gleefully told Emboffs, "business has been booming" since the withdrawal. Emboffs observed no vehicles crossing the border in either direction, but local Egyptian pickup taxis were ferrying Palestinians back and forward to El Arish. Consumer goods including foodstuffs, cigarettes, and electronics made up the majority of the significant quantity of merchandise being transferred back across the border to Gaza.

4. (C) The Embassy has contacted liaison and security forces to gain information on next steps re border control. These sources report that an 1800 deadline has been established by which time all Palestinians must return to Gaza or face arrest for entering Egypt illegally. Emboffs report that this deadline is being publicized on the border but note that given the large number of Palestinians in the El Arish area, it is unlikely this deadline can be enforced.

5. (C) While the Egyptians are moving very slowly to control the border, this issue is obviously a priority for Egypt from the aspect of domestic security. We recommend that press guidance on this issue follow the following lines:

--We are in touch with all the parties and we share their concerns on the seriousness of the developments on the Gaza-Egypt border following the IDF withdrawal from Gaza.

--It is clear that the parties are moving to address this situation and are coordinating a response. We refer you to the authorities concerned for specific measures being taken.

--The Egyptians are deploying Border Guards ahead of the agreed timetable for securing the Gaza border. They have also sent additional police to the border to control the situation.

--We will remain in touch with the parties as they address this issue.

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